

18. April 2024

The Father draws men

Jn 6:44-51

'At that time, Jesus said to the crowd: No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father, and learnt from him, comes to me. Not that anybody has seen the Father, except him who has his being from God: he has seen the Father. In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

No one can recognise Jesus and call Him "my Lord" except by the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:3); or, as today's text says, no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him.

Faith is therefore, in the first instance, a work of God, which then requires our acceptance and our putting it into practice on a daily basis. This offer of faith is available to every person and excludes no one. This makes the call to evangelisation all the more urgent, so that all people may learn what God has in store for them.

In today's Gospel, Jesus continues to instruct the Jews, so that they can better understand Him and the Father.

The bread which the Israelites had received during their wandering in the desert, and which became for them the great sign of God's presence (Ex 16:4), is now made present in Jesus. It is no longer only a sign that testifies to the presence of God; the one who worked this sign makes Himself present. It is no longer only the material bread, which is necessary to preserve natural life; but it is the One who is life Himself (Jn 14:6).

Now the Jews were invited to grow in the knowledge of God, to recognise His presence in the person of Jesus and thus to gain a great light to understand more deeply that the whole history that God had written with them was oriented towards the coming of Jesus and His presence in their midst.

The experiences of the Old Covenant were a journey and a preparation for the coming of the Messiah: *"Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die"*.

We know that the Jews used to find it difficult to understand these words of the Lord, perhaps also because they tried to embrace them in their human way of thinking. The same can happen to us!

However, it is more a question of the light of faith penetrating us, and not so much of being able to grasp it immediately with our understanding. For faith is a supernatural light, which first has to spread within us, and only then can we understand it better with our reason, which is only a natural light, with its limitations.

In order for this light to be able to work in us, then, an open heart is more necessary than a great intellect. Therefore, when we are confronted with mysteries of faith or questions related to it, we should not try to understand everything immediately with our understanding, but first listen.

In today's Gospel, the Lord quotes a word from the prophets: *"They will all be taught by God"*. If we apply this statement concretely, we will listen to God as our Teacher, so that what He wants to tell us can penetrate us, gladden our heart and enlighten our understanding.

Perhaps this is the deepest problem, which is why the Lord was not received in the way that would have corresponded to truth and love. Jesus often encounters hardened hearts, hearts that are unwilling to allow themselves to be instructed. Also in the Old Covenant we hear about this suffering of God, how often we hear the complaint that the people do not listen, that their hearts are closed, that they are stubbornly rebellious, that they are too proud to understand the humble ways of God! Here is the situation where the Lord stands at the door of our heart and knocks, but it is not opened.

Apart from the fact that we should always examine before God the state of our own heart, so that it will never be closed to His instructions, we cannot forget to pray for those people who have yet to be touched by the gospel, so that they may perceive how the Father draws them and open the door of their heart to Him. God wants nothing less than to give Himself... and that is enough!